

"Light Shining in Darkness"

Isaiah 60:1-6; Matthew 2:1-12

January 7, 2024 – ***Epiphany Sunday***

Introduction

- Start with a vivid description of the Wise Men's journey. Picture them following the star through a dark, desolate landscape, mirroring our own search for truth and light in challenging times.
- Introduce the central theme: "In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 5:16). This sets the stage for a discussion on the transformative power of faith and light in darkness.

The Quest for Light in Darkness

- Discuss the universal experience of darkness, both literal and metaphorical, in our lives. Introduce Isaiah 60:1-3 to paint a picture of hope: "Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you."
- Reflect on Francis Bacon's insight: "In order for the light to shine so brightly, the darkness must be present." This quote beautifully ties into the scripture, highlighting the necessity and value of darkness in understanding light.

The Choice between Light and Darkness

- Transition into the concept of free will and the choice between light and darkness as described in John 3:19-21, focusing on the contrast between those who love darkness and those who come to the light.
- Bring in G.K. Chesterton's perspective: "The issue is now clear. It is between light and darkness and everyone must choose his side." This echoes the biblical theme of moral and spiritual choices.

Transformation through Trials

- Discuss how trials and challenges can lead to spiritual growth and enlightenment. Reference Elie Wiesel's profound statement: "No one is as capable of gratitude as one who has emerged from the kingdom of the night."
- Align this with the journey of the Wise Men, who, despite the darkness of their path, continued their quest, leading to a transformational discovery.

Continuous Journey Towards Enlightenment

- Introduce Jonathan Edwards' thought: "We cannot believe that the church of God is already possessed of all that light which God intends to give it." This opens a discussion on the ongoing nature of spiritual growth and the continuous quest for divine light.

- Relate this back to the journey of the Wise Men, who were guided by a star – a symbol of divine guidance and the continuous search for spiritual truth.

Conclusion

- Conclude by encouraging the congregation to reflect on their personal journey towards light. Ask them to consider how they can be a guiding light to others, just as the star guided the Wise Men.
- Reiterate the importance of faith as a beacon in our lives, guiding us through darkness to a place of deeper understanding and connection with the divine

: The Journey is Part of the Reward

Introduction

- Begin by drawing a parallel between the long and arduous journey of the Wise Men and our own life's journey. Describe the Wise Men's uncertainty and challenges, yet their unwavering commitment to their quest.
- Introduce the theme with Psalm 119:105: "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." This verse sets the tone for the discussion on the journey towards spiritual growth and enlightenment.

Embracing the Process

- Elaborate on the concept that the journey itself is as important as the destination. Using 1 Peter 2:9, illustrate how believers are chosen to embark on a journey from darkness to light: "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light."
- Discuss the insight from Sadhu Sundar Singh: "Those who ought to become the light of the world must necessarily burn and become less and less. By denying self, we are able to win others." This can be applied to the concept of self-growth through trials.

Resilience and Growth in Trials

- Highlight the importance of resilience and growth through trials. Use Ephesians 5:8-9 to discuss the transformation from darkness to light: "For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light."
- Incorporate the wisdom of Richard Sibbes: "Measure not God's love and favor by your own feeling. The sun shines as clearly in the darkest day as it does in the brightest. The difference is not in the sun, but in some clouds which hinder the manifestation of the light thereof." This can be related to the idea of perseverance through spiritual and life challenges.

The Reward of the Journey

- Discuss how the Wise Men's journey culminated in the joy of discovering Jesus. Compare this to our own spiritual journey where the process of overcoming challenges brings us closer to spiritual truths and enlightenment.
- Use the insight of Helen Keller: "Faith is the strength by which a shattered world shall emerge into the light" to emphasize the reward of faith and resilience in the face of adversity.

Conclusion

- Conclude with a reflection on how our personal struggles and journeys shape us. Encourage the congregation to view their challenges as opportunities for growth and deeper spiritual understanding.
- Reaffirm that just like the Wise Men, our journey, no matter how difficult, is rewarded with deeper insight, growth, and a closer connection to the divine.

Sermon Section: The Joy of Spiritual Discovery

Introduction

- Begin by painting the picture of the Wise Men's ultimate moment of discovery - finding Jesus. Emphasize the overwhelming joy and fulfillment they experienced at the end of their journey.
- Introduce the theme with Luke 1:79: "To give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace." Highlight this as a metaphor for our own spiritual discoveries and the peace they bring.

The Moment of Spiritual Epiphany

- Discuss the concept of spiritual epiphany as a moment of deep realization or discovery that profoundly changes our perspective. Use Micah 7:8 to illustrate this: "Do not gloat over me, my enemy! Though I have fallen, I will rise! Though I sit in darkness, the Lord will be my light."
- Connect this to Desmond Tutu's wisdom: "Hope is being able to see that there is light despite all the darkness." Reflect on how spiritual epiphanies often come after enduring hardship and navigating through darkness.

Finding Peace and Joy in Discovery

- Elaborate on the inner peace and joy that come with spiritual discoveries. Use John 12:46 to emphasize the role of Jesus as the light in our lives: "I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness."
- Introduce the thought of Martin Luther King Jr.: "Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do

that.” Discuss how embracing spiritual truths brings light into our lives, driving out darkness.

Encouragement to Seek Spiritual Enlightenment

- Encourage the congregation to actively seek their own moments of spiritual discovery and connection. Urge them to be open to these experiences, especially in tough times, as they can bring profound peace and joy.
- Use the insight of Marianne Williamson: “As we let our light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence actually liberates others.” Highlight the communal aspect of spiritual enlightenment.

Conclusion

- Conclude by reflecting on the transformative power of spiritual discoveries. Encourage the congregation to cherish these moments of enlightenment and to share the joy and peace they bring with others.
- Close with a reminder that, like the Wise Men, each step of our journey, each challenge we face, is an opportunity to discover deeper spiritual truths that bring light into our lives and the lives of those around us